

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, December 12, 1889, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Southern Pacific R.R. Portland, Oregon, Dec. 12, (1889?) My dear Alec:

We are just leaving Portland in all its glory of setting sunshine and southward bound expect to reach San Francisco on Saturday. I had scarcely written the last word when happening to glance up I saw a beautiful snow white mountain glowing in the crimson sunlight raising up behind the fir trees. I called Papa and together we watched it sometimes increasing in size and sometimes hidden as trees or houses intervened. I never saw anything more solemnly grand and beautiful than this great purely shaped Mt. Hood standing solitary and alone in its grandeur the only mountain high enough for us to see. Papa says it is ten thousand feet high. We have been dreadfully disappointed in the weather ever since we left Portland the first time rain and snow came into our calculations and we were prepared to endure them, but the thick mist that hid everything was provoking beyond measure sometimes it would begin to clear and the sun would come out and we would watch with what patience we might for Mt. Tacoma to reveal herself but either the mist came down again or the day was over. We came up from Moxee in Prest. Schultze's private car. There was a strike on the line and the conductor being socially inclined informed us that there was 24 ft. of snow on the mountains so that we retired to rest with pleasant anticipations of snowblockades and lookouts. It was very surprising that I did not sleep very much that night but I did not regret it for the moon shone brightly and aided by the snow made the night almost as light as day, enabling me to enjoy to the full the majestic beauty of the tall old fire standing motionless under their pure white covering the outlines of the mountains the depths 2 of the ravines. All Tacoma is building; the only thing in that busy smoky mushroom city that seems finished is the fine large hotel overlooking the Sound and indeed that is about the oldest building there. Papa says it made the place.

Library of Congress

The climate at first hearing sounds perfect, warm in winter and cool in summer, never above 80° but enthusiasm cools when it is admitted that it rains nearly every day. The city is built on shelves dug out of the bluff which are so high and steep that walking along one street on one side the foundations of the houses are several feet above, while on the other the roofs are level with the street. Land seems dearer than in Portland, and naturally when there is so little fronting on the water. The Commencement Bay Land Imp. Co. are at work draining the tide lands in the bay, and above the residence houses crowd the bluffs treading on each others skirts. Everywhere the evidence that the city is beginning and hasn't had time to take breath and enjoy possession. Lily took me into one house, that of a Wall Street speculator who having made his pile came here to invest it. He now owns eighty thousand acres of woodland and the sawmill we saw puffing clouds of steam up from the new bay land is his. The house is more homelike looking than most of the others, with a small beautifully kept lawn on which we saw roses blooming. Inside the house was the very artistic refined abode of a modern New Yorker or Bostonian. Some one described Mrs. Brown as a New York Lady from Boston, born in San Francisco! She was in Boston spending Christmas with her sons who are at school there. We went into the ArttExchange established by her and found it an exact copy on a small scale of all others. As we came down hill picking our way with dificulaty by aid of fallen planks through 3 the slippery mud, the clouds parted enough to give me some idea of Mt. Tacoma's tremendous height. Like Mt. Hood it leaves all other mountains at its base and allows no rival in its majestic height. It is more full of sharp angles than Mount Hood which looks a perfect rounded cone. It is perfectly overwhelming the rate at which cities are being born and growing along beautiful Puget Sound which I love as being much like our own Bras d'Or lakes. It is impossible not to be carried away by the rapidity at which money is being made in real estate at Tacoma, Seattle and Fairhaven, the last the youngest of all, born a year ago and now the terminus of five railway lines. I want to sell out some of my railroad stock and invest. Mortgages are safe at eighteen percent.

Library of Congress

Goodnight — Love to Marmie and the children, Yours ever, Mabel.